Konzepte des Slawischen

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The Linguistics of Resentment: Primeval Language, Imaginary Language and the Suffering Identity in Eastern Europe

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Just as there is an *outsider art*, a sphere defined by French critic Jean Dubuffet, so there seems to be an *outsider linguistics*. It is an immensely rich corpus, the outline of which we have only glimpsed, a parallel linguistics with its own history, distribution networks, obsessions and fantasies. It has its resurgences, too, through time and space, in a thousand pieces from the same initial wound, the same suffering… the same resentment. In Central and Eastern Europe, it is called the "New Paradigm"[1] and can be located next to the work of the "logophiles" compiled by M. Pierssens (1976), where the boundaries between science and lunacy, where the limits between linguists, poets and madmen become less distinct.

Yet it would be too simple to rhyme comparison with reason. Indeed, the New Paradigm, unlike the outsider art, is not the modest and silent production of marginal people to be discovered by patient collectors. Rather, the New Paradigm goes to the front lines in a loud controversy on the internet, at conferences or in massive books. It attacks its sworn enemy, the "official science" on its very field, that of argumentation which claims scientific objectivity through a superior rationality, intellectual and moral legitimacy, in the name of Truth itself. In the rhetoric of revelation, it claims having "decrypted an enigma," long kept secret or hidden.

The authors of these fantastic theories are amateur linguists or professional ones, philologists and historians, essayists, writers, teachers or priests, engineers or doctors in physics. They all believe themselves to be holders of a radically new knowledge, to be revealing a truth that had hitherto been hidden for political purposes by a silent conspiracy. The insight they publish tends to be upsetting, innovative – and always flattering to the nation to which they belong.

Of course, the representativeness of these texts is difficult to assess. Depending on the country, their authors might be illuminated cranks or successful

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[1] The "New Paradigm" is a phrase which can be found in different Central and Eastern European countries, both in the circle of uralists in Finland and, in Russia, with epigraphists like V. Čudinov. I use the term here to refer to all texts proposing any radical questioning of commonly accepted ideas in diachronic linguistics. This set of texts, apparently disparate, produced by people who write in total reciprocal ignorance of each other, or at least without ever mentioning one another, seems surprisingly homogeneous, so that I think possible to study it as a whole and highlight its salient common elements. I shall henceforth call all researchers, scientists and pseudo-scientists who claim to be followers of the New Paradigm "innovationists."

academics. But even assuming that they represent only themselves, a fact remains highly disturbing: people from different countries, greatly distant from each other, presumably in total mutual ignorance of one another, produce strikingly similar texts about their own language and therefore their own "people," – what C. Applegate (1990) calls "a 'George-Washington-slept-here' version of history."

I would like to bring forward three theses: 1) the New Paradigm is nothing new; 2) it constitutes a separate chapter in the history of linguistic ideas, teaching us a lot about the amazing subject of language, the fantasies that it reveals; and 3) the frontiers of science and non-science are more porous than we can find in the teaching of positivist epistemology.

1. Why So Much Suffering?

It is a commonplace to talk about the crisis in Central and Eastern Europe, and specifically about an identity crisis in all countries that, until the First World War, were part of one of the three "central empires" (Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire). Economic backwardness (as compared to Western Europe) combined with the feelings of rejection or contempt from the West – these constitute the "philosophical geography" as described by Larry Wolff (1994) of the question of whether Eastern Europe is in Europe or Asia.[2] This question is not new, it hearkens back to the Enlightenment and beyond.

But in the contemporary culture of these countries a new phenomenon has manifested, related to the collapse of values in the twilight of communism: the loss of faith in rational science. Of course here, as everywhere in the world, wizards, fortune tellers, healers and charlatans share a successful market of gullible customers. Neo-Paganism in Russia is not very different from neo-Druidism and Wicca or the New Age movement in the Western world. But what is astonishing in Eastern Europe is the massive presence of a pseudo-scientific discourse, which enjoys some success among the general public. All boast a radical scientific novelty, from the "New Chronology" of the Russian mathematician Academician Anatolij Fomenko, who completely reimagines world history by recalculating the dates of solar eclipses, to the "alternative history" of Ukrainians Ju. Silov and O. Bilous'ko, who rewrites the history of Russian-Ukrainian relations in an inverted mode. All claim epistemological relativism by proposing "unconventional assumptions."

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[2] For the Czech writer Milan Kundera, Russia is not in Eastern Europe but in "Western Asia." The cardinal points have a much more substantial emotional and symbolic weight than the positivist view of geography allows.

Even more surprising is the disproportionate attention given to New Paradigm arguments based on linguistic analyses. From the North Cape to Cape Sounion the cry of a suffering identity, of quest for truth in the *forms of language* can be heard – attracting a steady interest from the general public by its use of historical linguistics. True, in France Occitan specialists debate whether Gascon and Languedoc are the same language but these arguments do not appear in primetime TV-shows. In Russia, on the contrary, the phenomen is mainstream enough that the professional linguist A. Zaliznjak feels obliged to denounce the New Paradigm in public lectures (Zaliznjak 2010).

Albania, Slovenia, Estonia, Ukraine are young states where intellectuals yearning for recognition engage in a post-colonial discourse to reclaim their history, long ridiculed, ignored or falsified by hated occupiers or régimes that sold themselves to foreign powers. But Russia, a vast state and major world power, creates the appearance of identical claims. The rhetorics of post-colonial discourse does not seem to depend on an objective inferiority situation. Everywhere truth must triumph over lies, and what it reveals is the extent of the efforts used to conceal them:

> What is notable in the case of Ukraine, is that the truth about her often exceeds our imagination. (Gubernačuk 2002: 178)

> The people has the right to know the truth, especially if it is the truth that enables man to be proud of its people, its language, its history. (Riznyčenko 2001: 3)

This phenomenon has been well known since the Renaissance: intellectuals of a new community in need of recognition embark on the invention of a glorious past of heroic ancestors, either to claim a larger territory, to justify hatred of their close neighbour. They try to find meaning in a present situation considered miserable and unfair in order to dream of a grandiose future. This is what Marc Angenot (1996: 11) calls

> the thinking of resentment [,] [...] any situation of inferiority or subordination [which] entitles one to the status of victim;[3] any setback, any failure to take the lead in this world can be transmuted into merit and legitimize ipso facto complaints against those allegedly privileged, allowing a full disclaimer of responsibility.

M. Angenot emphasizes the relationship between the end of utopias of progress in socialism and a "neo-tribalism" which

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[3] On this topic, Léon Poliakov uses the word "megalomania" (1990: 14). I think the notion of inferiority complex and compensatory delirium is better suited to the phenomenon in question.

in a pathos of complaint and specific grudge, bends the idea of Rights to turn it into a loud market of the "right to difference", for the benefit of groups maintaining disputes relying on insurmountable litigation and a spiteful reinvention of a "past" to avenge. Particularist resentment becomes pervasive. (Ibid.: 12)[4]

In addition to these criteria, in the linguistics of the New Paradigm, the fact of not being recognized and accepted by the "official science," is the best proof that one is right and the latter fomenting a widespread conspiracy. The method here consists in seeking arguments in favour of a pre-conceived notion. Thus the glorification of the innovationist's nation is a thesis fuelled by the mania of persecution. The impossibility of advancing any rational argument to an innovationist precludes communication, even by those who have tried to contact the innovationists from without.

1.1. Our Ancestors the Etruscans, or the Dream of Filiation

A basic premise: in the Bronze Age, just after (or before) the last ice age and before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, there was a magnificent and very ancient civilization that covered the vast territory from the Atlantic ocean to the Black Sea. There lived a great peaceful, democratic and glorious people. This people may, depending on the patriotic narrative at hand, be pre-Indo-European or proto-Indo-European, but it is in itself the source of the whole European culture. Archaeological relics can be found everywhere, and linguistic survivals can be observed in all the languages of Europe. But the native language of the nationalist researcher is unique: it enables the effortless reading of this primitive, or primeval, language. Unlike its neighbours, it retained the Language of Origin almost unchanged. Under various names, this primitive people is linked to Pelasgians or Etruscans and spoke a language that gave rise to Sanskrit. The goal is 1) to differentiate the language from its nearest neighbours, 2) to challenge the idea that the Greeks and Romans may have been the origin of European civilization.

Slovenia:

> There is also the question of the original language of Europe, which was the basis for the first Indo-European languages, among them we must mention Veneti and Illyrian. I dare say that this original language was proto-Slavic. (Tomažič 1996: xiv)

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[4] On *resentment* as a way to explain the "Eurasianist" ideology of a group of Russian emigrés in the interwar period, see Moret 2008.

Ingushetia:

> In the contemporary Indo-European languages of Europe we find a substrate whose origin seems obscure, and of which, most of the time, there is no written evidence. [...] In the history of mankind some languages have disappeared, others have emerged. But this process has rarely resulted in a language disappearing without a trace. Depending on the remains of this ancient language we can sometimes determine which people has lived on a given territory in ancient times. Some European and Soviet scientists have established lexical similarities between the Caucasian languages and those of Western Europe. How could the Caucasian lexicon be found so far from the region called the Caucasus? (Užaxov 2008: 6–7)

Albania: We will "lift the veil and realize that next to great classical civilizations there were other peoples who had their place in history, too." (Briquel 2003: 3)

1.2. A Conspiracy Theory

Unfortunately, this essential truth has so far been inaccessible, either because of general ignorance or due to the malice from those who have a monopoly on speech. As it is taught to us, history is a lie. Under the name of "official," "established," "academic" science, this duplicitous history even conspires to obscure the former glory of the nation. In Slovenia, the plot is the work of communists who remained in power and extended the Austro-Germanic linguists' intrigues of denying the greatness of Slovenian culture; in Russia or Lithuania it is often the work of various "anti-patriots" such as Jews living on the territory of the fatherland. It is always the truth about national history which is violated by "anti-patriots" who, having risen to positions of power in the academic establishment, smother the voices of the lonely but courageous innovationists under a blanket of silence. Indeed the "small peoples" who are supposedly deprived of history are despised or ignored. But thanks to the tireless and difficult work of inevitably solitary researchers, those who go against the flow of received ideas, fabulous discoveries come to the knowledge of a public "devoid of prejudices." They succeed despite the heavy silence of the official science subservient to a pernicious ideology, which denies the existence of this ancient and rich civilization. Fear of the Other expands into a rhetoric of denunciation:

Russia: "[...] falsification of Russian history, imposed on us from abroad." (Azov 2007: 343)

The sense of threat is omnipresent: the language and values of the nation are in danger of extinction. Emigrés often felt the duty to maintain these values in all their purity and the truth about their language, but prominent examples of this ideology of resentment flourished in the Soviet era and, to an even greater extent, in the national communism of Ceaușescu in Romania.

This truth discourse is based on a formula devoid of malice: "They say that *p*, the reality is *q*."

Lithuania:

> Soviet World History says that "[i]n the first half of the ninth century between the middle Danube and the hills of the Elbe and the Oder the vast state of Western Slavs was formed: the Principality of Great Moravia." (Vsemirnaja istorija 1957) In fact at the time of the formation of the Principality of Great Moravia and up to 865 there were no Slavic languages on this territory. (Satkjavičjus 1999: 22)

> Usually Gothic is related to the Germanic languages, whereas in reality Gothic is the product of the hybridization of Galian[5] and Finno-Ugric languages. In Gothic it is easy to see a resemblance with Finnish and Lithuanian Samogitian. (Ibid.: 36)

> The Jews have taken many Galian names of places and people, which were afterwards proclaimed as being Jewish and Christian names. Lithuanian and Russian linguists often want to get rid of these Galian and non-Jewish names as being foreign. (Ibid.: 13)

> So far the main Lithuanian linguists and historians for some unknown reason do not publish the results of Ju. Šejmis, thereby hiding data of extreme importance to the international community. (Ibid.: 14)

Albania:

> Despite all this [the hyperbrachycephalia of the Pelasgians, which is identical to the current Albanian – P.S.] they have found a way to put aside one of the oldest languages in Europe and exclude a people who contributed to the outbreak of two great civilizations of the Western world: the Greek civilization (via the Pelasgians) and the Roman one (through the Etruscans). (Aref 2004: 2)

Slovenia:

> These surprising findings have not only attracted admiration, but also harsh criticism from those who cannot accept that they made wrong deductions in the field of historiography and archaeological heritage. [...] The third part of this

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[5] The author speaks of "gal'skie jazyki," which cannot be translated here as "Gallic." For want of anything better, I propose the term "Galian." It seems to be a Baltic or Celtic substrate in the languages of Europe.

book is a response to these criticisms, it aims to dispel the false theories which have hitherto surrounded the Veneti and their identity. [...] We would like to break the barrier of silence that surrounds the Veneti culture, and present the reader with an unobstructed view of Europe's distant past, which is, to some degree, still reflected in the Slovenian nation. (Tomažič 1996: xvi)

Tatarstan:

The real details of the past have been particularly deformed with the help of linguistics. (Timazin 2008: 23)

A mixture of despair and passivity, the New Paradigm, its suffering sublimated into a dream of greatness, lacks a grip on reality, proclaims no action programme, but revels in dreams and lamentations. As with any ideology of resentment, it merely mimics those it affirms itself to be different *from*. Its only goal is to be *like* the envied, admired and hated Master.

Moreover, there is no solidarity in this post-colonial discourse with other "oppressed," equally robbed and humiliated. Rather, the aim is as much to belittle the poor neighbour as the rich oppressor. An endless rehashing of the same chimeras of glory and seniority is the only solution to the disease of resentment. Without any positive programme, innovationists of different countries cordially hate each other, even if they claim the *same* suffering. They deny the others who are oppressed the right to be as oppressed as they are themselves. Building a "new theory" has the distinct advantage of being able to reaffirm oneself while avoiding any comparison with those from whom one wants distance.

It is not enough, however, to demonstrate that the proponents of a New Paradigm are "amateurs," as A. Zalizniak tries. Such an attempt would be quite innocent. A specific political project hides behind the odds and ends of the (pseudo-)linguistic argument of the New Paradigm – though it is usually obscured by an apparently scientific and objective discussion – a radical denial of politics in favour of a naturalistic and scientistic ideology.

This book transcends all ideological positions. Needless to say, all efforts have been made to scrupulously avoid any nationalist motivation. (Tomažič 1996: xvi)

1.3. Grassroots: Nativism and Protochronism

As a process of legitimation, nativism is a theory of *continuous* ethnolinguistic identity through time. Its obsession with identity is a compensation for an unhappy consciousness, for collective feelings of insecurity. Torn between anti-Romanism and idealization of Western Europe, nativism uses rhetorical devices

to prove the deep, sacred origin of the Nation[6] and its language. In the total confusion of synchrony and diachrony, the question "who are we?" becomes veiled by the question "where do we come from?" The discourse on the unity and continuity of the Nation replaces the Marxist discourse on differentiation and change. There are ultimately two kinds of peoples: the "natives" who have a right to occupy the land, and the "invaders", to whom this right is denied: "The Pelasgians are an indigenous people, the Greeks an invading people." (Aref 2003: 9)

Protochronism is an extreme variant of nativism, adding to the theory of *origin* that of *precedence*. This term, coined in Romania at the time of Ceausescu, means a modern trend of cultural nationalism. It aims to attribute an idealized glorious past to the country as a whole on the basis of ethno-linguistic reasoning. Called "Dacology" by its supporters and "Dacomania" by its detractors, this ideology attributes intrinsic superiority and precedence over all the peoples of Europe to a supposed Dacian and Thracian ancestor of the Romanian nation. Through total rejection of any source, predecessors, or models in any intellectual fields, this ideology necessarily ends up in denying that the Romanian language should owe anything to Latin, apart from some marginal loans. Ironically, on behalf of superior Latin values, it goes hand in hand with a reaction against the barbarism of the Soviet occupying forces. The linguistics of resentment is torn between affirmation of the East and dream of the West.

It is the same with the "Veneti theory." This nativist theory about the origin of the Slovenes denies that the Slovenes are southern Slavs who arrived in the sixth century by migration to the Eastern Alps. It claims that the proto-Slovenes (i.e. the Veneti) inhabited this region "since time immemorial" and that words denoting the essential realia of alpine life may not have been brought by migrants from the plains.

> In the second part of the book, the author interprets the Veneti and Etruscan inscriptions from the Slovenian language and its dialects, and other Slavic languages, including Church Slavonic. He makes a compelling case for the proposition that his findings reveal that the Veneti were a proto-Slavic people, whose language is preserved in the modern Slovenian until today. (Ismael 1996: xi–xii)

Let us note that the language of the Nation, the curator of the primeval language, persists particularly in mountainous regions that are protected by their inaccessibility and favoring endogamy. Eastern Alps, Balkan mountains, Caucasus and Basque Pyrenees are phantasmagorical places. They are particularly popular in the New Paradigm:

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[6] I will use "Nation" with a capital letter to denote any innovationist's nation.

> The language of the Pelasgians has remained almost intact for millennia in the impregnable mountains of Albania, immune to the numerous invasions. (Aref 2003: 9)

2. The Enigma of Similarities

> Ancient Greek bears astonishing resemblance with the Gheg dialect of northern Albania. (Aref 2003: 9)

The New Paradigm is a never-ceasing quest for kinship. The writing of orphans demanding familial ties, it reveals the unbearable tension of yearning for parents, while claiming absolute uniqueness. The desire not to be left behind, to be recognized, is such that it clings to any resemblance between languages, even the most approximate. The problem will then be to define resemblance of form: which criteria prove resemblance? What are its limits? Where does the likelihood of a resemblance end?

The question of how to explain the similarities between unrelated languages arose as early as the mid-nineteenth century.[7] The common ancestor-and-divergence theory has been challenged by H. Schuchardt with the concept of hybridization, and by N. Troubetzkoy with that of convergence. The New Paradigm likewise refutes the common ancestor. But it offers a different and contradictory alternative: polygenesis, nativism, migration theory, diffusionism and substrate theory at the same time. We have seen that the New Paradigm professes pervasive hatred of "official science," accusing it of conspiracy against the truth. The denigration of its results is transferred to its methods, which means that it has no accountability to any rationality: the intuition that *no resemblance can be accidental* is enough to support a quest for identity whose sole object is the original home of the nation to which one belongs. In this type of argument, asking the question is sometimes akin to providing the answer:

> In Georgian "time" is said xani, and in Veinakh xa: might Greek chronos be related to the Georgian and Veinakh variants? (Užaxov 2008: 26) [8]

2.1. Polygenism and Anti-Darwinism

The New Paradigm professes an implicit or triumphant polygenism of peoples and languages: in this strange theory of spontaneous generation, "nations" seem

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[7] On this point, see Sériot 2014: chap. 6.

[8] The family of the author, Zaurbek Užaxov, like all Ingush, was exiled to Kazakhstan in 1944 by Stalin's decree.

to have existed separately since the emergence of Homo Sapiens, continuing in a straight line without interruption and without mixing. The New Paradigm rejects the model of the family tree not in the name of convergence (*Sprachbund*, union of languages), but by projecting the current diversity onto an immemorial past, which is called "in the beginning, "in all eternity," or "since time immemorial."

By postulating an identity unchanged through time, this essentialist ideology rejects any idea of evolution. In an ambiguous relationship to diffusionism, it also claims creationist atomism: the primordial elements (primitive monosyllables) remain unchanged over thousands of years (and over thousands of kilometres in the case of migrations to India). I think we can see here an echo of antidarwinism which, since the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859), prefers all sorts of variants of preformationism over epigenesis: species are creations of God, not subject to change.

Linguistics often follows the evolution of biology in its own pace. In the nineteenth century linguistics transforms from a static science of language – unseparated from Logic, classifying languages as offshoots of the sons of Noah or as degenerate forms of the great classical languages – to a science of phenomena that are subject to permanent changes, evolution and extinction.

In this respect, the New Paradigm is a throwback to the time before the scientific revolution of the nineteenth century, to a world fixed and stuck in a huge synchrony, or more precisely achrony or even uchrony. Its principle is that what is now has always existed (and better so). Parmenides rather than Heraclitus. In fact, it is a hyper-diffusionism from an "initial homeland" (*Urheimat*), or "original kernel" or "cradle" – all metaphors of happy childhood.

The New Paradigm rejects any genetic filiation between languages in order to have no common ancestor with its neighbours. It is of course not surprising to find parallels between Celtic and Lithuanian, two Indo-European languages. But then, any resemblance between two languages can be explained only by contact (borrowing), conquest (violence, bondage, enslavement) or substrate (evidence of prior settlements on a territory). At the same time, it serves as evidence of one's own ancientness: the language of the innovationist is necessarily the primary language. For this reason we often find the same examples in different parts of the New Paradigm. If the name for "fire" is the same in Sanskrit as in the language of the innovationist, then this is evidence that Sanskrit "comes from" or "can be explained by" the latter, which may well be Lithuanian:

Sanskrit *agni* – Lithuanian *ugnis* (Satkjavičjus 1999: 15)

as Ukrainian:

Sanskrit *agni* – Ukrainian *vogon'* (Silov 2003: 30).

We shall see that the argumentative core is based on the assumption, never demonstrated because it is unprovable, that *any resemblance of forms, even approximate, is a sign of primordial identity*.

2.2. Etymology, or Proof by Name

The names testify. (Šavli 1996: 6)

The New Paradigm does not follow the scholastic adage that *Nomina sequentia rerum*; it is not a "mimology" (Genette 1976). The referent of its sign is not a thing, but another sign, whose only advantage is to belong to the innovationist's mother tongue. In most cases, the meaning is irrelevant. The main thing is to practice an unhistorical "etymology" with the existential aim of finding the key to the ethnogenetic riddle. Then the method is very simple, and comes down to follow an adage which might be summarized as *Pun and paronomia*.

Always an *ad hoc* device, lacking consideration of the system, New Paradigm etymology is more a gloss in the Renaissance tradition than a historic reconstruction in the manner of the Neo-grammarians. Each case is different, and the method of moving the boundaries of morphemes may be a pun, rebus, charade and spoonerism. Much as young children seek to explain any unknown word with a known word, the etymology relies on a very old rhetorical figure known as paronomia.

Albania:

> Athens, founded by the Pelasgians and whose name is explained by the Albanian "Ethana" which means betrothed. (Aref n.d.)

The total unhistoricity of the New Paradigm, so outrageous from the point of view of historical grammar, is perfectly acceptable from the point of view of Cratylism. The semantics of the pun is an obsessive quest for a *hidden meaning*.

The notion of "folk etymology" is of course only the first step: it reinterprets the morphemic structure of a word either by changing its borders or by swapping one or more phonemes. For instance in Russian the word *poliklinika* ("polyclinic") is mischievously reinterpreted in *poluklinika* ("semi-clinic": a clinic that is not really a clinic).

Observing this phenomenon among the changes in the Russian language after the revolution S. Karcevskij writes in 1923,

> [t]he living language does not like unmotivated words, and where the old link between the word and the concept has disappeared, where there has never been any link for us – as, for example, in borrowings – it seeks to establish motiva-

tion. Thus "popular etymology" is formed: *spekuljant* ["dealer"] is a phenome-
non too close to everyday life to leave people unconcerned, so that the people
transforms it into *skopuljant* (from *skopit'*: "to accumulate", or *skupoj* "stingy",
etc.). *Marodër* ["marauder"] becomes *mirodër* ["tear the world"].

This tempting device enjoys great success with non-specialists, because of its
apparent accessibility to everyone. The epilinguistic knowledge of the speaking
subject is amply sufficient to make up for all the means of discovery necessi-
tated by the practice of classical diachronic linguistics. Everyone can partici-
pate in the game with just a little imagination and above all by subscribing to
the premise that *any form is necessarily significant*.

The etymological analysis sometimes relies on a syllogism with a semantic
basis. As an example: one side of the Matterhorn (Italian Cervina) looks like a
cliff. *In addition*, the Slovenian word for "cliff" is *čer*. *Therefore* we have an
obvious trace of the former presence of the Veneti in the Swiss Alps. (Šavli et
al. 1996: 52)

But most of the time, the method of pure resemblance reveals the true pur-
pose of the paronomastic investigation, which is to prove an earlier, and conse-
quently more legitimate presence in Europe. In Western France: is not the name
of the *Vendée* an obvious proof of its *Veneti* origin?

One might think that the primary meaning of a word is its *true meaning*,
waiting to be deciphered, but it is not always so. The innovationists wonder
how a Russian word like *kil'* ("boat keel") can be found in the name of the city
of *Kiel* in Germany, or the Russian word *salo* ("bacon") in the Italian town of
Salo, not to mention the Russian word *var* ("tar") in the name of the Var river
in France. One just has to "guess" that the name of the city of Cologne (*Köln*,
Russian *Këln*), "comes from" or "reflects" the Russian word *klën* ("maple").
Any proper name is supposedly "deciphered" when resemblance to the lan-
guage of the innovationist has been established: the Norwegian surname Knut =
the Russian word *knut* ("whip"), the English surname Bob = Russian *bob*
("bean"), the French surname Luc, in Cyrillic transcription *ljuk* = Russian *ljuk*
("trap door").[9] Of course, the explanation does not explain much, but who cares.
It is the *presence of the sign* that counts, not its meaning. It is far from the Cra-
tylian issue of the "rightness of words."

The "truth" of meaning is the mother tongue of the innovationist:

Tatarstan:

Linguists argue that the combination of letters ИА is an ending. But can we
agree with them, if we know that Tatar iia means "nest", and accept for an end

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[9]   All these examples are taken from Zaliznjak 2010.

what is the beginning of the beginning? In the words Franciia, Italiia, Finliandiia
[...] the nest of the peoples can be found. (Timazin 2008: 37)

The innovationists do not bother with embarrassing details. The Latin word
crux "is pronounced *krus*," "cross" in Tatar is said *təre*. But the Tatars of Nižnii
Novgorod in their conversation use the word *krus'*. Hence the following
reasoning: the name for the Russians in Russian (*russkie*) can be explained
from the Tatar *krus' kija*, which means "cross-bearers." The rest is just details,
"[t]wo identical sounds [k] are superfluous, so we got rid of them in pronuncia-
tion: RUS'KIE." (Timazin 2008: 25)

Lithuania:

> One can find trace of Galian conquests in many place names. Thus in Andalusia
> above Granada stands the fortress that the Arabs called Al-Kal'a al-Hambra, re-
> named Alhambra by the Spaniards. This fortress had been built earlier by the
> Vandals or the Goths who called it Alcazabą [*al'ka sava*]. Lithuanian *al'ka* means
> "sacred mountain," where pagan rituals take place, and *sava* means "his/our."
> The meaning of this name is thus "our sacred mountain." (Satkjavičjus 1999: 12)

2.3. The Primeval Language as Universal Metalanguage

The process discovering the New Paradigm is a sudden illumination followed
by an imperturbable series of deductions.

Ingushetia:

> Like many Veinakhs[10], I was always tormented by the question of the origin of
> my people. [...] During an English class the teacher wrote on the board the new
> words of the text. One of these words aroused in me a certain astonishment. It
> was the word *toss*, which has the same meaning in Veinakh. There are, of course,
> coincidences, and loans in different languages. That is why after a while I
> stopped thinking about it. But soon another known word arose: *chin*, in Ingush
> *čen'g*. In Khvaršin, one of the languages of Dagestan, the word "chin" sounds
> the same: *čiečen*. [...] The correspondences between the languages of two peo-
> ples as distant as the English and the Veinakhs, in our time separated by thou-
> sands of kilometers, were an enigma to me. (Užaxov 2008: 12)

> This new word, *chilly*, reminded me of the Veinakh word *šil* "cold." This could
> not be a mere coincidence any longer, and indicated a special relationship be-
> tween the English language and Veinakh. [...] The English word *teach* sounds in
> Veinakh very similar: *deš'*. (Ibid.: 13)

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[10] *Veinakh* (or *Nakh*) refers to the group of languages of the north-central Caucasus, in-
cluding Chechen and Ingush.

Then the machinery gets out of hand, and connections swell exponentially, creating a frenzy in an author intoxicated with his "discovery:"

> English: *cut*, Ingush *khodd* (same meaning), *kodt* "scissors;" *hence*, Ing. *khinz* "just now;" *idle*, Ing. "odl;" (same meaning) *marry*, Ing. *miari* (same meaning), mar "husband;" *quit*, Ing. *iit* "leave;" *yell*, Ing. *ell* "cry." German: *Heimat* "homeland," Ing. *vej mott* "our land, our language;" *Berg* "mountain," Ing. *berd* "bank," Urartean *berd* "hill," Armenian *berd* "fortress." (Ibid.: 15)

> Pictish or Scottish Gaelic: *cian* "distant," Ing. *gian* (same meaning); *leag* "to throw," Ing. *leg* "to drop;" *mall* "slow," Ing. *mall* (same meaning); *miste* "worse," Ing. *mist* "sour." (Ibid.: 150–151)

Italy was populated by Caucasians before the arrival of the Italic peoples. The proof is, once again, in the similarities between Latin or Italian and Ingush words:

> Italian *lottare* "fight," Ingush *lattr* (same meaning); *sera* "evening," Ing. *seiri* (same meaning), Urartean *siel* "night," Georgian *ser* "evening;" Latin *vastus* "empty," Ing. *vjas* (same meaning); *venire* "come," Ing. *vin* "to arrive;" *dicere* "to say," Ing. *ducr* "to speak." (Ibid.: 106)

Any resemblance, even approximate, is equated with origin. But of course, total ignorance of the history of words leads to the inadvertent oversight of *loan*. Thus, the Veinakh word *sapp* "soap," obviously a borrowing from the Arabic *sabun*, is considered "the origin" of English *soap* and Italian *sapone*. (Ibid.: 15)

The purpose of a New Paradigm etymology is to reconstruct the scattered, dispersed pieces of the pre-Babelian language that did not separate us from things and called them by their true names.

In Tatarstan, the Russo-Tatar pidgin of Din Timazin (2008) makes it possible to "give sense" to the opacity of Russian words.

> EVAKUATOR [= dump truck for towing away badly parked vehicles]: = EVA KUA TOR: EGO (EVO) KUATOR

> gloss: KUATOR is the imperative form of the Tatar verb KUARGA, meaning "to hunt;" EGO = accusative of the Russian personal pronoun "it." In pre-babelian, or "pre-glacial" language, the true meaning of EVAKUATOR is therefore "hunt it." (Timazin 2008: 9)

Sometimes innovationists read one another and correct the others' interpretations, always in favour of their own language. The Tatar D. Timazin, for example, (ibid.: 9) cites the Russian L. Ryžkov (2002) who argues that the Hebrew word *dereg* which (written without vocalization according to the Hebrew script) appears as *drg*, should in fact be read "the Slavic way" *doroga* ("road"). (Ibid.: 158) According to Ryžkov this word *dereg* means "road, path," but

Timazin corrects him. In fact the word is Tatar, it should be read *dərəžə*, which means "honor, prestige, authority." The "hidden meaning" is "power" – and from this Tatar word comes the Russian word *deržava* "state power." But *deržava* in turn will be "deciphered," that is to say, reinterpreted now with a morphemic cutting from Russian and pseudo-Russian vocables: *deržava = derži* (Russian: "take, hold") *ba*, that is to say "hold in your hands the divine (*bo [a]žestvenuju*) holy grace (*blagodat'*)". Gloss: "This is why the power is dear to leaders who are afraid to lose it."

The hybridization of Tatar and Russian opens up unprecedented possibilities for combinations. The "illuminations" are linked together quickly. Take Istanbul, the former Constantinople: everything finds all its original meaning for those who can read through Tatar.

Konstantin = kön östən tön, which means "the day (*kön*) is higher (*östən*) that night (*tön*)," i.e., the East is superior to the West (an allusion to the "transfer of the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople in the tenth century"). It is also quite natural that Constantinople became Istanbul:

ISTAN = ÖSTEN (Tatar): "top"

BUL = BUD (Russian): "Be," i.e. "Be Higher!" (Ibid.: 9)

The endless chain of glosses on innumerable pages quickly makes one dizzy. One is captivated by the whirlwind of interpretative delirium. But one can also, in the infinite vertigo of verbal creation, end up a Mallarmé or a Jean-Pierre Brisset.[11]

3. Kossinna's Postulate

The reconstruction of the underground history of the New Paradigm is beyond the scope of this text. It suffices to consider some milestones which Sophie Fisher (1996) calls "still the same old stuff."

A name that quickly comes to mind is that of the German philologist and archaeologist Gustav Kossinna (1858–1931), a specialist in the proto-history of Europe and of the "Germanen" in particular. Kossinna does not start with a hypothesis but rather with an assumption presented as indisputable evidence. It consists of an exact match between an archaeological "culture" (in the sense of G. Childe), a reconstructed language and an ethnicity that remained intact and identical to itself even despite formal, minute changes. Close to the *völkisch*

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[11] "Any ideas that can be expressed with the same sound, or a series of similar sounds, have the same origin and present between each other a more or less obvious relation of things existing from time immemorial or having existed formerly in a continuous or accidental way." (J.-P. Brisset: La grande nouvelle, 1900)

movement, its ideological base is anti-Semitic, anti-Slavic and anti-Roman.[12] Its archaeological and philological methods rely on an essentialist, timeless conception of the speaking community labelled, in the manner of German Romanticism, a "nation."

The New Paradigm at hand will resume Kossinna's argument by replacing the *Germanen* with its own imagined ancestors:

> The Galian states and peoples who were scattered over much of Europe, from the Urals to the Baltic and the Black Sea, were the greatest enemies of the Roman Empire. These were the ancestors of Latvians, Lithuanians, Russians, Poleszuks, Poles, Slovaks and Ukrainians (Satkjavičjus 1999: 38)

And Užaxov quotes the Soviet (Chechen) linguist Ju. Dešeriev:

> According to the testimony of an author from the Antiquity, Valerius Maximus, the Roman Empire imposed on subject peoples not only the yoke of strict laws, but also the yoke of language. [...] Its brutal and ruthless violence, knowing no limits, having spread to the native language of the conquered peoples, was one of the causes of the decay and death of the Roman Empire. (Dešeriev 1963, quoted without specifying page, by Užaxov 2008: 113)

The Soviet archaeologist and linguist Nikolai Marr (1864–1934) is a key figure here. Of Georgian origin, he invented a mythical people, the *Japhetids*, whose original homeland is the Caucasus and whose traces can be found in all the languages spoken in Europe. He also worked from audacious etymologies, either internal – German *Hundert* "hundred" comes from the word *Hund* "dog." The dog is the name of the tribe's totem, then comes to designating the multitude, therefore "hundred" (Marr 1936: 391) or by using one language as the metalanguage of another. Thus, the Chuvash name *yoməz* "wizard" appears to be a variant of the ethnic name of the Chuvash themselves: *Subar* or *Šiβaš* or *θəvaš*, *Suvas*, etc. In this Chuvash word *yoməz* lies a relic of pre-Indo-European Mediterranean word *yomer* "kept by the Greeks through misunderstanding as the proper name of the poet Ὅμηρος (Homer)." (Marr 1926: 17). He also identified the element *roš > rus* ("Russians") in the Etruscan language as well as the ethnic name of the Etruscans: *rassen > ras/roš*.

In the early twentieth century, so fertile in inventions, philological resentment gradually finds its ancestors. Around the same time (1913) in Romania N. Densuşianu (1846–1911) writes a book of 1152 pages arguing that the Carpatho-Danubian region was the birthplace of all great civilizations, existing already 6000 years BC. Called the "Pelasgian civilization," it constitutes the origin of almost all peoples, languages and civilizations of Europe, Asia and North Africa. Speaking a single language, this population, i.e. the Pelasgians, gave rise to

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[12] *"Los von Rom!"* ("Break with Rome!") is a slogan of the *völkisch* movement.

the Thracians, Getae, Dacians, Sarmatians, Iranians, Etruscans and then to Latins, Germans and Balts. Densuşianu's argumentative strategy is that any vague phonetic similarity in toponymy and onomastics between the names of antiquity and their "equivalent" in modern Romanian is supposed to be a proof of the priority of the Daco-Romanian civilization.

Examples:

Atlas = Alutus = Olt = Munţii Oltului

Phasis = Buzău

Terrigenae = Tirighina.

For Densuşianu Romanian is not a Romance language, resulting, as do French or Spanish from the late romanization of a native substrate. Rather, it is "a continuation of the Pelasgian language of the Carpathians." Latin was not established in Dacia with the conquest and colonization of Trajan, "as all Romanian and foreign linguists and historians believe," but, rather, it was born in the Carpatho-Danubian space in a distant and nebulous past, only to be spoken later in Italy and other parts of Europe, due to hypothetical "Pelasgian" migrations. (Babeş 2001)

The resentment of the Slavs against the Germans finds expression in the philological work of one of the greatest representatives of the Slavophile ideology in Russia in the nineteenth century: Aleksej Xomjakov (1804–1860). Xomjakov likewise traces the Slavs through the Veneti peoples, whose name "is explained" not only by *v(o)dn-*: "men of the water," (referring to the mysterious "Sea Peoples") but also by *vil'ki*, the supposed root of the word *velikie* ("great"). Long before the Slovenian venetology specialists he had "discovered" that the Latin name of the city of Vienna (*Vindobona*) was evidence of the presence of the Veneti. He also relied on the etymology to prove that Aquitanians in Caesar's time were not Celts but Slavs: Bigorre = *pogor'e* ("in the foothills"), Périgord = *prigor'e* ("close to the mountains"), and as for the Roussillon, needless to say he insisted on the presence of the word *rus*.

For a final, swift overview, let us go back again this time to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the general goal of historian-philologists seems to have been denying to Hebrew the role of the language of Paradise and affirming instead the essential (we would now say "primeval") seniority of their national languages.

Vasilij Trediakovskij (1703–1769) argues in his text *Tri rassuždenija o trex glavnejšix drevnostijax Rossijskix* ("Three speeches on three main Russian antiques"), that all names and ethnonyms in Europe originated in the Russian language. Like Leibniz, he believes that the Scythians are the origin of the European population. Thus, "Scythians" (*skitfy* in the Russian of that time) "comes from SKITANIE ["wandering" – P.S.], that is to say free movement from place to place." (Klubkov 2011: 43) The word "Sarmatians" is explained by "*Car-*

mety (those who are the best [*Czars*] in the art of throwing [*metat'*] projectiles."
And a scholarly tale helps to link the Sarmatians to the Amazons:

> Herodotus relates that the Sarmatians come from the Scythians and Amazons.
> But other authors write that the Amazons spent only one month with their
> husbands; they kept with themselves the girls who were born from this union,
> and left the sons to their fathers [...]. I think that this was going on while the
> Scythians had settled on the other side of the Volga, which they called *Ras*,
> abbreviated *Ra*; and the Amazons lived on the Don. It may be that young
> Scythians living with their fathers and not seeing their mothers were calling
> their fathers, asking them where their mothers were. Then their fathers would
> answer: ZA-RA-MATI ["mothers (are) on the other side of the Volga"]; so the
> children were called Zaramaty or Sarmaty because they had their mother in the
> West, on the other side of the Volga. (Klubkov 2011: 43)

We shall conclude with Leibniz who, in his *New Essays on Human Under-
standing* (1703, published in 1765), argued that the German language is the most
primitive of all languages, even more primitive than Hebrew itself, "it seems
that the Teutonic has kept more natural and [...] adamic elements." Leibniz be-
lieved that at the origin of all languages spoken by the descendants of Japheth
was a Celtic language common to the Germans as well as the Gauls, and that
"we may conjecture that it comes from the common origin of all these peoples
descended from the Scythians, who came from the Black Sea, and crossed the
Danube and the Vistula, some of whom could have gone to Greece while the
others reached Germania and Gaul." (*New Essays* III, 2, 1990, 218, quoted from
Eco 1994: 223) Scythians, indeed, are another name for the Veneti, the Pelas-
gians, Etruscans...

Conclusion: A Semiotic Challenge

The primeval, pre-Babel language, was not entirely wiped out in the confusion
of tongues described in Genesis. Splinters are scattered in all languages of the
sons of Noah. But the apparent chaos covers a hidden order: one language
among the multitude is privileged in that it alone has kept "almost intact" the
forms of this "preglacial" idiom spoken by the indigenous people in the glori-
ous origin of the European civilization, of which the Greeks and Romans are
only the heirs, impostors. Nothing is easier than to find the name of this prime-
val language. It is both common and unique. And we all speak it. It is the *moth-
er tongue* of each innovationist, which allows us to interpret the unknown by
the known, the obscure by the clear, the signifier of the other by the signifier of
oneself.

But therein lies the problem.

The innovationists' etymology is a science of the origin. But origin is not the beginning. Like the first romantic linguists, they believe that any change of meaning is but a degradation from an original meaning which, by definition, is the proper sense of the word. One must therefore always *return* to the first, original meaning, which is thus true. In this regard they keenly follow Turgot who in his entry on "Etymology" written for the *Encyclopedia* of Diderot and d'Alembert, says that this linguistic practice consists in seeking "the ἔτυμον τῆς λεξέως, which means the true meaning of a word (from ἔτυμος, true)." The method is clearly described here, in a non-historical way, as the "change of certain letters into others."

But the New Paradigm's unspoilt source, the etymological root, is never subjected to interrogation. It is an absolute, self-sufficient origin. If the name Galilee (in Palestine) is explained by Galicia (in Ukraine), the latter is decomposed from Gal-, an explanation which is ultimately accountable to no one: This root is an absolute beginning, the source of truth, that is to say, of transparency, of the signifier no longer screening the thing, of the signifier erased, missing, or, more precisely, so familiar that we no longer see it. The signified of the unknown signifier is the invisible signifier of one's mother tongue, the one that we take for the signified thing itself. Bopp's ban is ignored:

> Only the mystery of roots – or, in other words, the reason why such primitive design is marked by a certain sound and not another – we refrain from penetrating. (Bopp 1833, French transl. 1866: 1)

In this great vortex of glosses, *everything is a sign*: Reality disappears behind its representation. The quest for the hidden signifier is so obsessive that the signified is not important any longer, it becomes transparent. The signifier is its own signified, a goal in itself, the ultimate end in the quest for identity, an empty gap – before it is the search of a sign without content, sign with only one side, a Moebius strip moving all alone in front of the silhouette of the distraught sign-watcher. Thought has no more control over these forms, which can only endlessly refer to other forms. If what we get from this accumulation of deliria is the extreme pleasures of sound and word-play, the great paradox is that *the signifier's greatest autonomy arises in the obsession for its remotivation.*

But it soon seems that the indicator on the serious/derision axis becomes unstable. Zadornov is an engineer turned humorist, Čudinov is a doctor in physics, Fomenko is an academic mathematician: is it possible that they do not know what they are doing? A Sokal affair in a Russian mode, in which one could have become drawn into one's own game?

It is impossible to abandon a persistent suspicion, on reading all those insane texts: that of mockery, a huge, gigantic laugh, a vast hoax. This suspicion

cannot lead to truth but, rather, to another intuition that the boundary is blurred between the grating and devastating puns of the satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné*, or of French writer San Antonio, the mysterious ambiguity of Abbé Boudet, the imperturbable seriousness of Adolphe Pictet, the suffering of Mallarmé and dementia of J.-P. Brisset.

Isn't the diabolical autonomy of the signifier the very thing that makes us human, leaving us alone with the mystery of our condition as beings made equally of symbols and of flesh? Cutting the umbilical cord of our mother tongue – is this not the first step on the path towards independence and accountability?

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[13] The title of this book is based on a pun: *pročti* means "read!" and *čti* means "respect!" Respect is hidden in the word for reading.